

107TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. CON. RES. 107

Expressing the sense of Congress that Federal land management agencies should fully support the Western Governors Association “Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment”, as signed August 2001, to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place national resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire, and prepare a National Prescribed Fire Strategy that minimizes risks of escape.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 7, 2002

Mr. CRAIG (for himself and Mrs. FEINSTEIN) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of Congress that Federal land management agencies should fully support the Western Governors Association “Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment”, as signed August 2001, to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place national resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire, and prepare a National Prescribed Fire Strategy that minimizes risks of escape.

Whereas catastrophic wildfires not only cause environmental damage to forests and other lands but place the lives of

firefighters at risk and pose threats to human health, personal property, sustainable ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and air and water quality;

Whereas upon completion of the 2001 wildfire season, 81,681 fires burned 3,555,138 acres, which threatened rural communities nationwide and killed 15 firefighters;

Whereas more than 7,400,000 acres burned during the 2000 wildfire season—equivalent to a six-mile-wide swath from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles, California—destroying 861 structures, killing 16 firefighters, and costing the Federal Government \$1,300,000,000 in suppression costs;

Whereas an April 1999 General Accounting Office report to the United States House of Representatives, entitled “Western National Forests: A Cohesive Strategy is Needed to Address Catastrophic Wildfire Threats” (GAO/RCED–99–65) states that “The most extensive and serious problem related to the health of national forests in the interior West is the overaccumulation of vegetation, which has caused an increasing number of large, intense, uncontrollable and catastrophically destructive wildfires”;

Whereas an April 2000 United States Forest Service report, entitled “Protecting People and Sustaining Resources in Fire-Adapted Ecosystems: A Cohesive Strategy”, in response to the 1999 General Accounting Office report, confirms the previous report’s conclusion and further warns that “Without increased restoration treatments..., wildfire suppression costs, natural resource losses, private property losses, and environmental damage are certain to escalate as fuels continue to accumulate and more acres become high-risk”;

Whereas the July 2001 General Accounting Office testimony entitled “The National Fire Plan: Federal Agencies Are Not Organized to Effectively and Efficiently Implement the Plan” (GAO-01-1022T) before the United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health reported that “The Federal Government’s decades-old policy of suppressing all wildland fires, including naturally occurring ones, have resulted in dangerous accumulations of hazardous fuels on Federal lands. As a result, conditions on 211,000,000 acres, or almost one-third of all Federal lands, continue to deteriorate” and “[t]he list of at-risk communities ballooned to over 22,000”;

Whereas the escaped prescribed burn that created the Cerro Grande Fire in May 2000, that consumed 48,000 acres and destroyed 400 homes with losses exceeding \$1,000,000,000 in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the escaped prescribed burn that created the Lowden Fire in 1999 that destroyed 23 homes in Lewiston, California, highlight the unacceptable risks of using prescribed burning as the sole forest fuel reduction practice by Federal land management agencies;

Whereas similar catastrophic wildfire resolutions were passed by the California Legislature (AJR 69) and Western Legislative Forestry Task Force (R00-1) in 2000 and Oregon (HJM 22), Idaho (SJM 104) and Montana (HJ 22) in 2001;

Whereas the Western Governors Association’s “Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment” was signed in 2001; and

Whereas in 2000, the United States Congress provided an unprecedented \$2,900,000,000 in funding for the United States Departments of Agriculture and Interior wildfire fire fighting agencies to prepare for future fire-suppression efforts and take proactive steps to reduce wildfire risk on all Federal lands: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives*
 2 *concurring)*, That it is the sense of Congress that—

3 (1) in the interest of protecting the integrity
 4 and posterity of United States forests and wildlands,
 5 wildlife habitats, watersheds, air quality, human
 6 health and safety, and private property, the Forest
 7 Service and other Federal land management agen-
 8 cies should—

9 (A) fully implement the Western Governors
 10 Association’s “Collaborative 10-year Strategy
 11 for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Commu-
 12 nities and the Environment”, as signed August
 13 2001, to reduce the overabundance of forest
 14 fuels that place these resources at high risk of
 15 catastrophic wildfire;

16 (B) use an appropriate mix of fire preven-
 17 tion activities and management practices, in-
 18 cluding forest restoration, thinning of at-risk
 19 forest stands, grazing, selective tree removal,
 20 and other measures to control insects and

1 pathogens, removal of excessive ground fuels,
2 and small-scale prescribed burns;

3 (C) increase the role for private, local, and
4 State contracts for fuel reduction treatments on
5 Federal forest lands and adjoining private prop-
6 erties; and

7 (D) pursue more effective fire suppression
8 on Federal forest lands through increased fund-
9 ing of mutual aid agreements with professional
10 State and local public fire fighting agencies;

11 (2) in the interest of forest protection and pub-
12 lic safety, the Departments of Agriculture and the
13 Interior should immediately prepare for public re-
14 view a national prescribed fire strategy for public
15 lands that creates a process for evaluation of worst-
16 case scenarios for risk of escape and identifies alter-
17 natives that will achieve land management objectives
18 while minimizing the risk associated with prescribed
19 fire; and

20 (3) a national prescribed fire strategy for public
21 lands as described in paragraph (2) should be incor-
22 porated into any regulatory land use planning pro-
23 grams that propose the use of prescribed fire as a
24 management practice.

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